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Men's Center, he adds, has a capacity of 250 beds, up from 220.

Smyth notes that Eugene Mission typically sees a reduction of men, women and families using its services in the warmer summer months. There was, however, only a tiny drop in guests this past summer. Since Sept. 1, the shelter has been at capacity. Even the overflow beds are being used.

It is, Smyth says, "highly unusual" for the shelter to be this full almost year-round.

The uptick, Eck notes, includes a rise of the elderly at the shelter, men and women in wheelchairs or with dementia or tethered to oxygen tanks. "The silver tsu-

nami," is how Eck describes it.

According to the most recent data in the Annual Homeless Assessment (AHAR) to Congress in 2016, almost 67,000 elderly individuals in the U.S. (people age 62 or older), are in shelters. The report further states that homeless elderly individuals have increased 48.2 percent (21,549 people) between 2007 and 2016.

The Eugene Mission serves everyone with a limited staff and with a \$3.2 million donation-based budget that, as one Mission staffer puts it, is the "culmination of 1,000 small checks."

It is sometimes overwhelming.

"You have to remember to eat lunch," Eck says.

"It's hard, it's scary and it's sad," notes Johnna Wheeler,

Women and Children's Services manager. "But it's beautiful."

And well worth it, says Maria Cortez, the shelter's guest services program development analyst. "The meaningful connections you make here," she says of her work. "They're at a better place when they leave."

The transitional aspect of the Eugene Mission, in fact, may soon come to Sam and Jessica. Sam is searching for housing through Section 8. Jessica is working with ShelterCare. Both are hopeful.

"It's God's plan," Sam says. "It's day to day."

And they are thankful for Eugene Mission.

"It helps you build yourself," Jessica says. ■

The Eugene Mission is at 1542 W. First Avenue. For more information about its services, or to make donations or volunteer, call 541-344-3251 or go to EugeneMission.org.

Up the Ranks

SARAH MEDARY TAKES OVER AS CITY MANAGER PRO TEM

By Taylor Perse

Sarah Medary has been a bit of a polymath when it comes to working for the city of Eugene. Now she is adding more to her public service record in taking on the role of city manager.

In October, Mayor Lucy Vinis appointed Medary as the pro tem city manager following the resignation of Jon Ruiz, who held the position for more than 11 years. Although Medary is now temporary in the role, she is assigned with picking up where Ruiz left off — addressing homelessness, preparing for the 2021 International Track Championships and working on building community.

The city will eventually start a formal process for the selection of the city manager, and Medary says she is highly interested in staying in the job.

"I wouldn't have said 'yes' to this if I wasn't interested in the role," she says. "I think being in the role, as we get deeper into the fall, it will become more clear whether I'm the right fit."

In the meantime, Medary says she will be assessing different ongoing projects and learning how she can help the city follow through.

To alleviate homelessness, Medary says she stands behind the strategies of the TAC report, released in 2018, which outlined how city should address homelessness.

"We have a direction to do an emergency shelter, but we need to site it and make sure it actually happens," Medary says. "So that is a huge priority for me."

The city has been engaged not only with creating new affordable housing, she says, but also making existing housing affordable. Part of that, she says, is being thoughtful about fees and services people are charged for in their daily lives and cutting personal costs, like not owning a car.

Despite the uncertainty of how long Medary will be in the city manager's role, she is already looking ahead to Eugene's hosting the 2021 International Track Championship. The event is expected to draw thousands of people here from around the world.

"That is going to happen whether we want it to or not," she says. She adds that having the international track



Courtesy Sarah Medary

championship in Eugene is incredible. "It just seems impossible. Just the fact that it is coming to Eugene is mind-blowing, I think, for most people."

Medary says the city has a role in making sure the experience is safe and welcoming for visitors from everywhere. That creates a sense of financial urgency for other ongoing projects such as the downtown riverfront park and the new town square, she says.

"Our goal has been not to build anything that is just for that event, but instead we are investing our time and resources into things we know this community already wants and has been vocal about."

Medary may be taking over many of Ruiz's projects, but she says she has her own passions for community issues.

One of these interests is in mental health and addiction. Medary sees the issue more broadly as one of community well-being.

"The community piece is important. Part of it is do these people feel safe, and part of it is do people live in a place that's beautiful," she says.

Medary wants to focus on creating a community where people can connect and engage with everyone and the heart of Eugene is everyone's local neighborhood.

"Driving around, I've seen 'I love River Road/Santa Clara' stickers. I love those stickers. That is the heart of the community for them."

Medary grew up in Fort Worth, Texas. She bounced around colleges for a few years until she transferred to Colorado State University, earning a degree in horticulture. After hearing how beautiful the Northwest is, she moved to Seattle.

Medary lived in Seattle for a few years before going back to school to get another degree in landscape architecture. She decided to study at the University of Oregon, and says she heard good things about working in Eugene.

"With Eugene, it was 'You can go there and be yourself no matter who you are,'" she says. "I always felt like I belonged, and I want others to feel that way too."

She spent a few years working as a part-time parks specialist on a maintenance crew. Then she switched into public service, working in parks maintenance, in engineering, in recreation, as assistant city manager and running planning and development. Finally she became the head of the Public Works department a few years ago.

Medary says she has found happiness in each job she's worked at, and says she feels the same way of about her current post.

"You find your purpose at the intersection of your talent and the needs of the world," Medary says. "The closer you are to the center, the happier you are. I think I have a lot of talent in terms of creativity and thinking, and I'm also a good leader." ■